

**Cross-linguistic conceptualization of 'attention':  
American Sign Language (ASL) and Italian Sign Language (LIS)**

Phyllis Wilcox, Keith Cagle, & Sherman Wilcox  
*University of New Mexico, Gallaudet University, & University of New Mexico*

Iconic motivations and their complex interrelationships in ASL and LIS are often initially instantiated by an inchoate form of synecdoche. This propensity is exemplified in metonymic forms, such as GRASP and TAP-SHOULDER. However, iconic mental blends also motivate contiguity and association, cognitive processes that are found in signs such as REMEMBER and ARM-movements (reference points). The conceptual schematization of attention, for example, is found in signs such as REMIND (ASL) or DOMANDARE (LIS), which loses the meaning of a literal tap on the shoulder and extends to its abstraction. This conceptual abstraction is reflected iconically by the more abstract form of the sign. The conceptual mapping extends from the literal hand with its metonymic source connection to the metaphorical extension of drawing attention or 'reminding' someone. Chafe's (1994) 'focus of consciousness' and Langacker's (1987) 'schematic specification' drive the theoretical assumptions underlying this analysis. In addition, signed predicate verb stems provide the pattern of shared systematicity that Searle (1986) found to be vital to the comprehension and communicability of metaphors.

Metonymic (and metaphorical) extension in ASL and LIS are compared and analyzed through specific gestural verbs as they shift semantically from literal to cognitive experiences. The metonymic pliability and physical maneuverability of an object represented in a constrained manner in ASL and LIS demonstrates the strengthening of the demarcation between metonymy and metaphor. Instantiations gathered from semi-ethnographic interviews with native signers include IDEAS ARE OBJECTS TO BE MANIPULATED OR PLACED, IDEAS ARE OBJECTS TO BE GRASPED, IDEAS ARE OBJECTS TO BE CAREFULLY DISCRIMINATED. Qualitative semi-ethnographic inquiry was also extended to subjects who are native signers teaching at Gallaudet University in Washington, D.C. The interacting metonymic and metaphorical entailments found in these signed examples lead us to a deeper understanding of human cognition.

**Keywords:** attention, metonymy, metaphor, ASL, LIS

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